

Hearing on "The Construction of the U.S. Capitol: Recognizing the Contributions of Slave Labor"

Committee on House Administration

COMMITTEE HEARING

Wednesday, November 7, 2007

1:00 pm

1310 Longworth House Office Building

Hearing on "The Construction of the
United States Capitol: Recognizing the
Contributions of Slave Labor"

Committee on House Administration

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November 7, 2007 - 1:00pm

Longworth House Office Building - Room 1310

Hearing Overview

The House Administration Committee will meet at 1 P.M. on Wednesday, November 7th, for a hearing focusing on the contributions of slave labor in the construction of the United States Capitol.

In May of 2005, House and Senate Leadership announced appointments to a Task Force to study the contributions of

enslaved African Americans in building the U.S. Capitol. The Task Force was also charged with the task of developing recommendations to the Congress concerning appropriate recognition of these efforts.

To accomplish the first part of its charge, the task force worked with the Architect of the Capitol to create a documented history of the slave labor.

In 2005, the Architect of the Capitol's Architectural Historian Bill Allen, with Ken Kato of the Office of the Clerk and Dick Baker of the Secretary of the Senate, issued a report, "History of Slave Laborers in the Construction of the United States Capitol." The report's main points are:

- There is firm documentation from 1795 to 1801 of the use of slave labor for building the Capitol. After that time, slave labor was most certainly used, but there is no documentation of it. The documented work of 18th century slave laborers is now most prominently visible in sections of the Senate walls. This stone was quarried and transported by enslaved African Americans.

- The documented work of 19th century slave laborers is visible in the columns of Statuary Hall and the old Senate Chamber, quarried and transported by enslaved African Americans. Slave labor was undoubtedly used to build the 1857 Capitol extensions, but no documentation survives.

- Of the pre-Civil War African Americans working on the Capitol, the names of two are known: George Pointer, an enslaved man who bought his freedom and subsequently captained a stone-carrying boat; and Philip Reid, a slave laborer who famously assisted in casting the statue "Freedom."

In 2007, the task force began developing recognition recommendations. Staffed by the Office of the Clerk of the House, the task force reviewed relevant legislation, updated documentation and consulted with experts in the fields of history and museum studies. Staff distributed a selection of possible methods of commemorating the contributions of slave laborers to the task force members for comment, and from those comments assembled a slate of measures for the task force's consideration.

November 7th Hearing - The Construction of the United States Capitol: Recognizing the Contributions of Slave Labor.

WITNESSES

Representative John Lewis - Task Force Member

Panel One

Senator Blanche Lincoln - Task Force Member

Former Representative J.C. Watts - Task Force Member

Dr. Betty Gardner - Task Force Member

Mr. Currie Ballard- Task Force Member

Ms. Sarah Davidson - Task Force Member

Panel Two

Mr. Lonnie Bunch- Smithsonian Institution- Director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture

Mr. William C. Allen- Office of the Architect of the Capitol- Architectural

Historian

Ms. Felicia Bell- U.S. Capitol Historical Society

Follow the full Committee Hearing, witnesses will be available for interviews and questions from the media.

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The Committee on House Administration is pleased to announce that Committee and Subcommittee Hearings are now available in a live web-streaming format on the Committee Website - www.cha.house.gov .

We are hopeful that this format allows you to have greater flexibility in covering Committee hearings. Within the near future, hearing testimony will be available on the site as well. Until then, please do not hesitate to contact me if you need electronic copies of testimony following the webcast.